

Working during a Hurricane

Sometimes travelers face unique challenges specific to the area they are working in. For instance, what about all the hurricanes in Florida recently? When faced with a situation like this, what do you do? Do you stay loyal to your contract obligations and your patients, or do you run for safety? Personally, I don't know what I would do. It would be a personal dilemma. Nurses have a tremendous obligation and duty to others and yet they must not forget to take care of themselves.

Recently, I spoke with Peggy, a nurse who did choose to stay and work during hurricane IVAN. She says that nurses were required to work if they were on the schedule, as well as be on call. The hospital compensated the nurses well during this time by paying minimum wage for being on stand by and an extra bonus of \$100.

“During the storm, we had NO patients in the PACU, she said.... No one could get to us if they tried. We had a couple of patients break their hips that were operated on the next day via the generator and one patient who insisted he have his heart cath done, which was also done under generator power.”

“During the storm it was very scary. I thought for sure the roof was going to fly off any minute. Most slept thru it, but I was awake all night!!!” says Peggy.

From what I understand, some hospitals were suspending permanent nurses if they didn't show up for work. Whoever thinks about this kind of situation? Furthermore, whoever thinks about whether your travel contract allows flexibility for events out of your control?

I can't help but think about what it would be like to be a patient in the hospital during a hurricane. All the nurses are preoccupied and perhaps tired. Perhaps the patient also has family at home they are worried about and yet they are helpless in the hospital watching TV about all the turmoil outside and hoping that the roof doesn't cave in. Meanwhile, they are stuck in a small room in a small bed eating hospital food. It could be get depressing. Patients need nurses during times of crisis more than any other time.

What a tough call. I am glad I was in California during the hurricanes. I wouldn't want to have to make that type of decision of whether to evacuate or go to work. Way to go nurses for toughing it out.